

CD1 59:14

PIANO SONATA 6 (1986)

[1] 11:55

PIANO SONATA 4 (1982)

[1] The bell tolls thrice 2:17 [2] Prelude 4:13 [3] Dance I 1:02 [5] Dance II 2:43

[6] Tarantella quasi allegro barbaro 4:26 [7] Adagio 19:53

PIANO SONATA 2 (1979)

[8] Slow 8:43 [9] Ostinato I 11:34 [10] Ostinato II 2:23

CD2 75:51

PIANO SONATA 3 (1979)

[1] Adagio assai 12:42 [2] Tarantella (grazioso) 1:17 [3] Motive from Chopin's

Polonaise-Fantasy (Op 61) 0:13 [4] Adagio fantastico 8:11 [5] Canto 19:45

[6] Recitative 1:01 [7] Canto continued 0:51 [8] Recitative continued 2:28 [9] The

Polonaise-Fantasy deconstructed 4:32 [10] Canto end 1:59 [11] Adage Double 4:15

[12] Tarantella (vivace) 2:33 [13] Molto sostenuto 1:07 [14] Death/Love Music 14:48

CD3 70:50

PIANO SONATA 5 (1985)

[1] Chorale-Fantasy (Maestoso ma con moto di tutta forza) 2:28 [2] Allegro con

brio 4:26 [3] Refrain 0:18 [4] Allegro barbaro 3:25 [5] Chaconne (Moderato)

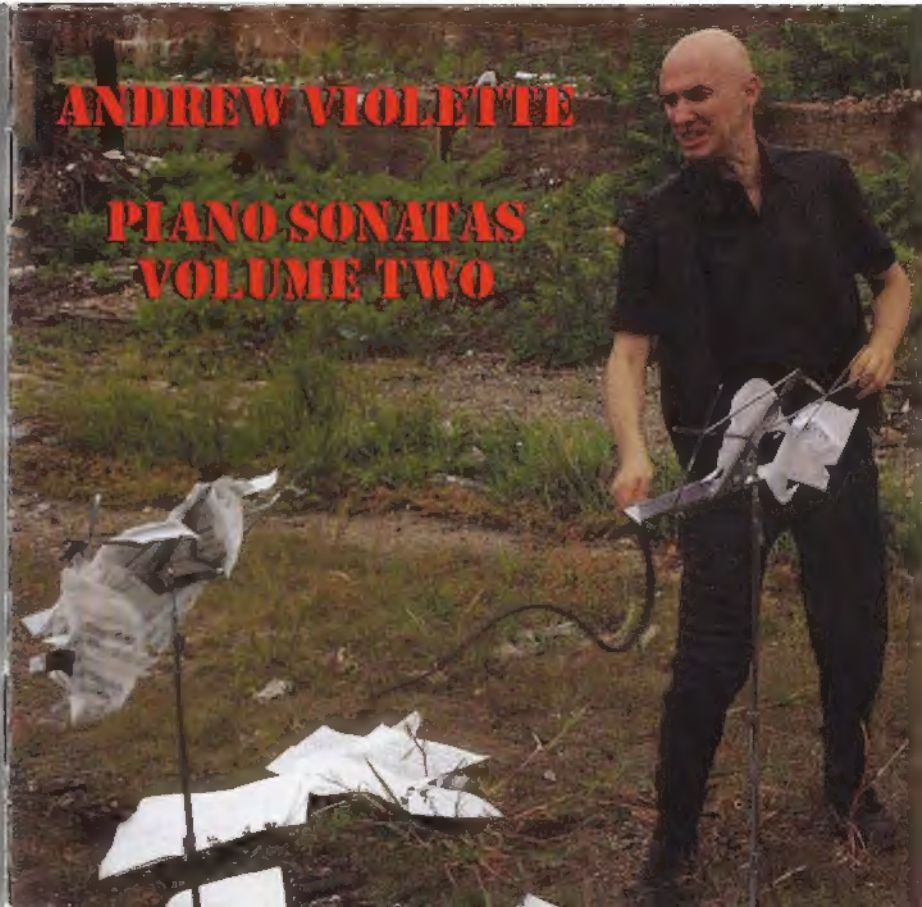
"When I was sinking down" 2:58 [6] Ritardando 5:39 [7] Adagio 33:11 [8] Refrain

0:28 [9] Moderato quasi conductus 4:18 [10] Trio quasi caccia 1:44 [11] Moderato

(da capo) 2:30 [12] Presto 3:31 [13] Choral 5:48

ANDREW VIOLETTE

**PIANO SONATAS
VOLUME TWO**



It's possible to view the sequence of Violette's sonatas as one extremely long piece. Everything in his music grows out of something that preceded it or anticipates something that will follow. It lives at the point of paradox — organized with mathematical precision. It sounds improvised: it develops complex ideas through minimalist repetitions. It traverses a wide universe of techniques, styles, and dynamics, clamorous sounds and shuddering silences, but its cumulative effect is unified, mystical, and ecstatic (the composer was once a monk). Some of the music is not pretty; if Violette is going to stare into the abyss, he is going to tell us what he sees there. The pounding rhythms are inexorable; there are influences and indirect quotations. His music often sounds like other music, but nothing else sounds or functions like it, which is a definition of originality. The composer's relationship to the piano is visceral, even violent — as carnal as his music is spiritual.

—Richard Dyer

The **sixth sonata** CD: [1] is three etudes back to back. I wrote it for Janice Weber who premiered it. Dead silence in the exact middle: the eye of a hurricane! Ghosts of dead pianists! I learned the piece for this CD. It's the hardest sonata to execute and the easiest to interpret: just play the notes.

[2] The bell tolls thrice before the **fourth sonata** unfolds. [3] The emerging *Prelude* is an early version of what I would later describe as a colorfield (one color, the threads of which constantly change). Gongs and trills yield to dances: [4] Dance I: dramatic jumps, fat chords, big octaves (a chaconne runs throughout both dances) [5] Dance II: ground bass, more lyrical, then [6] a *Tarantella quasi allegro barbaro*: extremes of loud/soft, high/low, legato/staccato.

[7] The *Adagio*, variations based on the Lutheran hymn "Herzliebster Jesu," unfolds in canonic divisions which eventually flow into a passage of whirlwind chords, then a slow, dissonant coda. The *Dance* returns, as does the hymn, this time "descending into the abyss" with brute clashes and silence. A final glacial version of the opening chorale ends the movement unresolved.

I wrote this piece for the Sanasardo Dance Company. I knew the music had to be as athletic as Paul's choreography, which included Kung Fu, jumps and lifts. I was learning Wu Mei Kung Fu in Elizabeth Strehl's studio in Chinatown when I wrote the piece.

[8] A web of incongruous elements interspersed with silence opens the **second sonata**. The first section is permeated by the polyrhythm three against four. Bass drones; unending trills; little things after Copland, Bach, Beethoven, Boulez, Chopin — all these will be developed in the third sonata. The two Ostinatos are based on a seventeen quick beat rhythm reminiscent of Spanish music: 3-4-3-4-3. [9] Ostinato I reminds me of a stiletto heeled cha-cha lady who stops every once in a while to step on a cockroach. [10] Ostinato II: very high and very low, punctuated by trills and silence—a castanet player gone wild. When I premiered this piece I played the opening much faster. The way I play it now, perhaps too slow, crazily quirky, irritates me enough to keep it.

If the first sonata [Innova 587] is characterized by classical brevity, and the second by a strange mix of minimalism and free atonality, the **third sonata** CD2 is open to a great many interpretations. When I premiered it in 1985, the New York Times characterized it as "wonderfully anachronistic, overheated Romanticism." I played it like Liszt. Now, my interpretation is more introspective, more daring. I would say reminiscent of Morton Feldman.

[1] Note the markings in the score. Each gesture is carefully delineated: *sonorous like bells, dark and sweet with an intense motion, getting dramatically louder with hardness...* you get the picture. About three dozen gestures craft the first *Adagio assai* (almost too slow). Continuous polyrhythms and changes of tempo create a malleable, plastic structure.

[2] After an off-the-beat *Tarantella (grazioso)* a motive from [3] Chopin's "Polonaise-Fantasy" is introduced (b[♭]-c[♯]-e-d[♯]). Not only is this going to run throughout the whole of this piece, it will find its way into many other pieces I'll write, culminating in my sonata for voice and piano "The Death of The Hired Man" (where it becomes the motive for Silas) [Innova 608]. It was my musical signature until I killed off the Hired Man.

[4] Gestures from the first slow music are "fantastically" transformed. They're inverted, played backwards, freely transposed twice as fast or slow with notes added and subtracted. In this *Adagio fantastico* I write something akin but not quite to the original, keeping a few parts and changing others. Listen for a collage of sound that I liken to a rock video.

[5||7||10] *Canto* is a long meditation on, "just how slow can slow be before it falls apart?" It's an extreme passage that begs you to listen to its silence-punctuated resonance. Note how time passes. As the chords accelerate they start to outline the Chopin motive.

[6||8] A *Recitative*, which comes from the first sonata, leads to [9] a deconstructed Chopin: real and unreal Chopin merged. Every young pianist wants to be Horowitz so I decided to write that fantasy into the music.

After everything is recapped: [11] *Adage Double* (all the gestures twice as fast), then a more outgoing [12] *Tarantella (vivace)* with a little Chopin snuck in, finally, [13] *Death/Love music*, the grand coda of the sonata trilogy and a bel canto celebration, with faster and faster virtuosity. Enjoy the ride.

The **fifth sonata** CD3 is based on the beautiful, bittersweet Appalachian folk hymn "What Wondrous Love is This" (1835). One afternoon an a cappella harmony was coming from the radio different from anything I had ever heard. The shape-note singing was rich and wild. The pentatonic feel of the Dorian melody and the stark open fifths gave the hymn a haunting quality right out of rural America. Here's the text:

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul! What wondrous love is this That caused the Lord of
bliss To bear the dreadful curse For my soul, for my soul. To bear the dreadful curse for my
soul.

When I was sinking down, Sinking down, sinking down. When I was sinking down, sinking
down. When I was sinking down Beneath God's righteous frown. Christ laid aside His crown
For my soul, for my soul. Christ laid aside His crown for my soul.

To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing, To God and to the Lamb I will sing, To God and
to the Lamb Who is the great I AM While millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing. While
millions join the theme, I will sing.

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on. And when from death I'm free, I'll sing
on. And when from death I'm free, I'll sing and joyful be, And through eternity I'll sing on,
I'll sing on, And through eternity I'll sing on.

[1] "Majestic but with motion and great force," the opening *Choral-Fantasy* sings the rendition of the untrained believers. The music is all over the piano with thick, ringing chords, vast arpeggios and sweeping scales—twice interrupted by a raw and joyous ostinato. The six note mode (d-e-f-g^a-a-b) is akin to the hymn harmony. [2||4] After a cadential d minor chord, a section marked *Allegro con brio* (fast, with life) and later the *Allegro barbaro* (a barbaric yawp), deconstructs the rhythm and melodic contour of the hymn. Rhythms are lengthened and shortened both regularly (either by the addition of a dot or by doubling of the note value) and irregularly (by the addition of irregular polyrhythmic values). Phrases, which can be read the same backwards and forwards, are embedded in larger phrases that are palindromes as well. Two, three, four-note chords are permuted in all possible ways. [3] A *Refrain* of 13 heavy chords twice intersects at the golden section this rustic dance of believers. [5] A *Moderato* paints three portraits of "when I was sinking down: 1) the hymn is sung very slowly in a steady beat throughout (mid-range) 2) three voices start high, sink lower and slower by degrees (16 notes to a beat; then 15 notes to a beat; then 14; then 13; all the way to 2—then start all over again) 3) a chaconne in the bass based on the famous Dido's Lament by Purcell (she sings about being laid in the grave because of sorrowful love). All three portraits are played simultaneously in triple counterpoint. A flourish from the very top of the piano to the very bottom ends the section. [6] Finally, there's a series of descending-chord phrases (again "sinking down") that, by way of metronomic modulation, slow to a full stop.

[7] In the half hour meditation of the *Adagio* the community of believers is drawn inward. The opening vaguely mirrors an *Adagio* by Mozart written after the death of his mother. Appoggiatura "sighs", register extremes, and dynamic extremes are underscored by a recurring bass. If it weren't for the intrusion of an ostinato, which becomes a minimalist mantra, the mid-section would be a classic development—but the steady pounding takes over fully half the section. Within this lies the hymn intoned very slowly, interrupted once by a series of d's framed by silence (D major and minor is all over the piece). Things are double, then triple counterpointed, in canons with baroque "affects". Long lines of parallel organum (after Perotin: well, maybe the medieval composer on acid) are four times interrupted by very low chant in a Schubertian coda (the end of the first movement of his great Bb major sonata). One would think the minor chords would end the movement but the 13 stabs shake it up.

[9||11] The *Moderato quasi conductus* gets folksy. The range is narrow, tending toward D and G^a, with medieval rhythmic modes in hocket and isorhythm. [10] The *Trio quasi ecclesia* is just a riff in D major

with a last alleluia. (For the record, caccia and conductus are dances associated with the hunt, you know, as in chicken cacciatore). Hocket and isorhythm, also from this period, are now popular with the minimalist crowd: Steve Reich and Louis Andriessen.

[12] I began the *Presto* after having learned Schuman's "G minor Presto"—and the opening of this bears some similarities to that. Triads of pure color jut out from the prevailing whirl that ends in a wisp. Did you get the hymn?

[13] A straightforward *Choral* with tri-tonal harmony and triple canon ends the thing.

As for the sonatas as a whole, I owe a great debt to certain visual artists and a few composers. Jackson Pollock once said that a person looking at his work should look passively and try to receive what the painting has to offer. I hope that the listener of these sonatas would relax and let the music overtake him. Sure, listening with the score is important but the best listening is the actively passive listener. This is why some of the sonatas are large. I want the listener to be engulfed by unfolding time. I want the listener to experience the work not from the outside but to step into the work like a big painting. To me, this makes the long piece "intimate and human" as Mark Rothko would say.

As for composers, it was Morton Feldman who taught me not to be afraid of silence. Not only the quality but the placement of silence is important. Within a large time span silence can be meditative and deep. One can write very slow and very fast music, very soft and very loud music, very short and very long music and it all balances out.

From Bach I learned the hidden charms of numbers. In his work, as in mine, Fibonacci series, primes, matrices and permutations abound. Not only this but also the symbolic numbers of Christianity play a defining role: 3 (Trinity), 5 (wounds of Christ), 12 (apostles), 13 (Judas), 7 (the perfection of the days) etc. Yet these things, in Bach as in my own writing, are hidden. It isn't necessary to know that sonata two is based on 17, the universal arbitrary constant or that there are 144 measures in section x to enjoy the music. Yet the numbers are there in secret for the glory of God.

From Roger Sessions I learned the integrity of the sustained melodic line and from Elliott Carter of the

importance of rhythm. Milton Babbitt and John Cage stretched my technical skills. From Richard Wagner I learned to dare.

Lastly, it was Messiaen who taught me that the tonality/atonality polarity, which everyone has been fighting about for years, is a false opposition. The defining harmonic question is not "what is the tonality of this piece?" but "is there resonance here or no resonance?" In this series of sonatas I use a great palette of harmonic techniques: modality, free-atonality, nonfunctional tonality, diatonicism, bi-tonality, strict combinatorial serialism, functional tonality, etc. Yet, they all share one thing in common: the music *sounds*.
—Andrew Violette

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Dedicated to my dad 1927-91 who taught me everything.